

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

TRANSPORTATION 2035

GENERAL FOCUS GROUP: PARTICIPANTS RECRUITED FROM RANDOM PHONE POLL

MAY 6, 2008

SONOMA COUNTY: CITY OF SANTA ROSA

Planning for future transportation needs: Of the 12 participants who attended the Sonoma County focus group, all but two indicated that priority should be given to investing in new transportation systems. Although the residents unanimously agreed that the roads and bike lanes in their community need extensive maintenance, they felt that developing new transportation systems should receive priority in planning for the future.

Maintain the existing system of roads, and the existing bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	2
Build new roads and add more bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	10

The participants' allocation of the \$30 billion dollar budget reflects their responses to the previous question on priorities for the future; however, the importance of maintaining existing systems emerged in these responses. Half of the respondents allocated up to 25 percent of the funds to maintaining existing transportation systems, 5 participants allocated up to 50 percent, and one participant allocated up to 75 percent.

up to 25 % (\$7.5 billion dollars)	6
up to 50 % (\$15 billion dollars)	5
up to 75 % (\$22.5 billion dollars)	1
100 % (\$30 billion dollars)	0

When asked to describe the projects that they would fund with the remaining budget, a majority of the participants mentioned projects related to public transportation, bike lanes, and creating a more pedestrian friendly community. Specifically, increasing bus routes and schedules (6), ferry services (3), extending light rail service to the area (8), adding bike lanes and improving buffers from traffic (5), improving sidewalks (1), and creating a car free zone in the main square of Santa Rosa (2). In comparison, only one participant said he would spend the remaining funds on roadway and highway expansion projects.

Throughout the group's discussion, the participants emphasized the need for investing in alternative transportation options, with a particular emphasis on systems for bikes and pedestrians. An overwhelming majority of the participants considered investments in the expansion of roadways and highways to be a step backward and unprogressive.

Congestion relief: If the \$30 billion dollar budget were spent only on maintenance projects, 3 participants indicated that traffic congestion will be "Somewhat worse" and 8 participants

reported it would be “Much worse.” One participant suggested gas prices and increasing frustration with poor traffic flow would naturally reduce driving and traffic congestion would be “Much better.”

Much better	1
Somewhat better	0
No change	0
Somewhat worse	3
Much worse	8

An overwhelming majority of the participants reported that investments in public transit options should take priority in efforts to reduce traffic congestion. In comparison, 2 participants indicated that the priority should be walking paths and bike lanes, and the remaining participant indicated investments in the highway system.

Highway systems to relieve traffic congestion, including ramp metering, high-occupancy toll lanes, etc.	1
Public transit options, including rail and buses to provide alternatives to driving.	9
Walking paths and bicycle lanes to provide alternatives to driving	2

The participants viewed several of the options as possible means of managing truck volumes along freight corridors. In response to this question, participants mentioned multiple plans, so responses in the below table sum to more than 12.

Keep trucks out of the peak commuter hours	3
Allow smaller trucks to use carpool lanes during congested periods for a fee	6
Encourage more cargo deliveries be made by rail or ferries	6
Build exclusive truck lanes supported by trucking fees	1
Provide more truck parking in commercial business areas	1

Attitudes toward focused growth: Overall, eight of the participants agreed that additional transportation funds should be provided to communities that are planning to build more housing along BART and other public transit lines. The four participants who advocated the even distribution of transportation funds suggested that Sonoma County should deter growth and housing development. It is important to note that these four responses reflect a desire to limit growth, rather than a preference for a system where housing development and alternative transportation are not considered in tandem.

Funds to communities that are planning to build more housing along BART and other public transit lines	8
Funds evenly to communities regardless of where they are planning to build homes	4

Providing transit access: When asked to describe the demographic groups that would have difficulty paying for public transportation, the participants mentioned minimum-wage earners, students, seniors, riders with disabilities, and anyone on a fixed income. A majority of the participants approved of allocating funds to provide discounted ticket programs. Further, eight participants favored amending the existing system to base these discounts on household income, rather than age or status in school. One participant expressed concern that this revision would increase bureaucracy, and three participants could not decide between the two alternatives.

Emissions reduction: A number of the participants reported that the natural resources in the area are the features they most like about their community, and that they are concerned about the effect of automobile emissions on the environment. Here, the group was somewhat divided between prioritizing alternatives to driving and improving traffic flow. Three participants prioritized improving traffic flow because it could create more immediate effects and would not rely on residents changing their transportation behaviors. These participants mentioned the lack of choices and that many Sonoma County residents are forced to rely on driving.

The nine participants who prioritized alternatives to driving presented this as the only way to produce a lasting effect on air quality in the region. These participants emphasized the need for education programs on alternative transportation and that large-scale expansion projects are needed to create a public transportation system that serves all Sonoma County residents. Several participants went so far as to suggest that steps should not be taken to reduce traffic congestion because increased congestion may be the most effective way of discouraging driving.

Reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving, such as public transit, bicycling, walking, etc.	9
Reducing traffic congestion and improving traffic flow to make it easier to drive around the Bay area	3

Final thoughts on maintenance versus expansion projects: The participants clearly understood that budget constraints would force difficult choices between maintenance and expansion projects. Following the discussion, several of the participants felt that maintenance should be less of a priority, and that investments in the expansion of alternative transportation systems would be the best way to plan for future needs. Three participants reported that they would spend less on maintenance than they had indicated at the beginning of the discussion.

up to 25 % (\$7.5 billion dollars)	8
up to 50 % (\$15 billion dollars)	4
up to 75 % (\$22.5 billion dollars)	0
100 % (\$30 billion dollars)	0

The participants were extremely resistant to discussing revenue measures or fees to raise additional revenue for transportation projects. Although they agreed that additional funds would

be required, the group was largely opposed to, or undecided on, the specific measures and fees without knowing the full details.